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CRANBERRY TURTLE BARS

Active time: 30 min Start to finish: 2 hr

For base

2 cups all-purpose flour
1/2 cup packed light brown sugar
1/2 teaspoon salt
1 1/2 sticks (3/4 cup) cold unsalted butter, cut into 1/2-inch cubes

For topping

2 sticks (1 cup) unsalted butter
1 2/3 cups granulated sugar
1/4 cup light corn syrup
1/2 teaspoon salt
1 1/2 cups fresh or frozen cranberries (not thawed; 6 3/4 oz), coarsely chopped
1 teaspoon vanilla
3 cups pecans (12 oz), **toasted and cooled**, then coarsely chopped

For decoration

2 oz fine-quality bittersweet chocolate (not unsweetened), very finely chopped

Special equipment: a candy thermometer

Make base:

Preheat oven to 350°F.

Line a 15- by 10-inch shallow baking pan (1 inch deep) with foil, leaving a 2-inch overhang on the 2 short sides. Butter all 4 sides (but not bottom).

Blend flour, brown sugar, and salt in a food processor, then add butter and pulse until mixture begins to form small (roughly pea-size) lumps. Sprinkle into baking pan, then press down firmly all over with a metal spatula to form an even layer. Bake in middle of oven until golden and firm to the touch, 15 to 17 minutes, then cool in pan on a rack.

Make topping:

Melt butter in a 3-quart heavy saucepan over moderate heat and stir in sugar, corn syrup, and salt. Boil over moderately high heat, stirring occasionally, until caramel registers 245°F on thermometer, about 8 minutes. Carefully stir in cranberries, then

boil until caramel returns to 245°F. Remove from heat and stir in vanilla, then stir in pecans until well coated. Working quickly, spread caramel topping over base, using a fork to distribute nuts and berries evenly. Cool completely.

Cut and decorate bars:

Lift bars in foil from pan and transfer to a cutting board. Cut into 6 crosswise strips, then 6 lengthwise strips to form 36 bars.

Melt half of chocolate in top of a double boiler or a metal bowl set over a saucepan of barely simmering water, stirring until smooth. Remove bowl from heat and add remaining chocolate, stirring until smooth. Transfer chocolate to a small heavy-duty sealable plastic bag. Seal bag and snip off a tiny piece of 1 corner to form a small hole, then pipe chocolate decoratively over bars. Let stand at room temperature until chocolate sets, about 1 hour.

Cooks' note:

- Bars keep in an airtight container (use wax paper between layers) 1 week.

Makes 3 dozen bars.

Gourmet

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